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Ingrown Nail

What is an ingrown nail:

This is when the sides or corners of the nail curl down and dig into the skin of the toe, causing swelling, pain, and redness of the side of the toe/finger. Any toe/finger can be affected, but the big toe is most common.

What causes an ingrown nail?

- Shoes that are too tight in the toe area
- Poorly shaped nails
- Injury/trauma to the nail (including picking at and biting)
- Fungal infections
- Arthritis



Figure 1: Ingrown toenail

If left untreated, ingrown nails can develop a secondary infection requiring further medical treatment.

Self care:

- **Soaking** your hand or foot in warm water (with or without Epsom salts) for 15-20 minutes
- **Place a small piece of dry cotton**, such as part of a cotton ball, under the corner of the nail
- **Elevate your hand or foot:** Raise your hand or foot above the level of your heart as directed. This will help decrease swelling and pain. Prop your hand or foot on pillows to keep it raised comfortably.
- **Prevent ingrown toenails:** Do not trim your nails too short or round the corners of your nails. Put a thin cotton pad on the side of your toe in your shoe. This may help decrease pain, help prevent an ingrown nail, and make it more comfortable to walk.
- **Avoid nail trauma:** Avoid wearing narrow-toed or tight-fitting shoes. Wear closed toed shoes when you do yard work or other physical work.



Treatments:

- You may require an antibiotic or antifungal medication to treat an infection of the nail or the surrounding tissue
- Minor surgery is sometimes required to remove part or all of the nail that is poking into the skin. If surgery is required your doctor will:
 - First numb the toe by injecting an anesthetic
 - The doctor will then cut the nail along the edge that is growing into the skin and remove that portion of the nail
 - In some cases the doctor may apply a liquid to the nail bed which will keep the toenail from growing back (for recurrent ingrown nails)
 - Take Tylenol or ibuprofen (or prescribed pain medication) as needed for pain
 - Keep the foot elevated higher than the heart as much as possible the first 2-3 days after the procedure
 - A dressing will be applied to the nail after completion of the procedure:
 - Daily changing of the dressing is recommended. Apply a triple antibiotic ointment (ie: Neosporin) and a bandage over the wound
 - Gently wash the wound with soap and water

After the procedure:

- Avoid running on the foot or heavy activity for 1-2 weeks
- Call if you have any increased pain, swelling, redness, or drainage

Q: Can Ingrown Toenails be prevented?

- A:**
- Yes, avoid tight-fitting shoes and trim your nails correctly.
 - You should cut your nails generally straight across (not curved) and do not cut too short.

